

Chapter 4

The nominal phrase

This chapter sets out to describe the syntactic structure and function of nominal phrases (NPs).¹ An NP consists of a phrasal modifier and a head, which is followed by a case marker as an extension to an NP. The head is the minimal NP. Thus we recognise an extended NP structure consisting of an NP + case marker. NPs function either as clausal modifier (argument), clausal head (nominal predicate), or as phrasal modifier (i.e. as a genitive-marked NP), as exemplified below.

- (4-1) *naa=ga* *ffa=u=mai=du* *saar-i-i*
 oneself=GEN child=ACC=too=FOC take-THM-NRT
ifi-tar.
 go-PST
 ‘(They) took their own child, too.’ [NP as direct object]
- (4-2) *kaun* *pžtu=u* *mmja* *mazimunu=dooi*
 that man=TOP INTJ monster=EMP
 ‘That person is in fact a monster.’ [NP as nominal predicate]
- (4-3) *naa=ga* *ffa=nu* *naa=ju=mai*
 oneself=GEN child=GEN name=ACC=even
ss-a-da...
 know-THM-NEG.NRT
 ‘Not knowing his own child’s name...’ [NP as phrasal modifier]

The extended NP structure is schematised in terms of its functional slots in (4-4) below. The head is obligatory, though there is a headless adnominal clause structure where the head slot is empty (§4.2.2). The modifier is optional. The head and the modifier constitute the core of the NP, and is followed by its extension, i.e. case.

- (4-4) (Modifier) Head =Case

¹ The structure and subclass of nominal will be dealt with in Chapter 5. I discuss the nominal phrase first because the subclassification of nominal in Irabu is defined in relation to NP structure, and the structure of a nominal word is in turn dependent on the subclass of nominal, whereas NP structure can be defined without reference to subclasses of nominal.

The occurrence and choice of the case marker vary, depending on the syntactic function of the NP (see below). Case is obligatory unless an NP functions as nominal predicate, or unless there is case ellipsis (§4.3.10.3), which may occur with core argument NPs (subject and direct object).

At a clause-level, an extended NP in an argument slot may be further followed by various limiter markers such as the additive quantifier =*mai* ‘too’ and/or information-structure markers such as the focus marker =*du*, as is illustrated in (4–1). Also, an extended NP as predicate may be followed by predicate markers (e.g. =*dooi* (emphasis) in (4–2)). These bound markers will be described in Chapter 9.

4.1. The modifier

The modifier of an NP may be filled by an NP itself (including an NP headed by an adjective), an adnominal (clause), or other limited constructions.

4.1.1. Modifier filled by NP

The modifier NP carries a genitive case marker as its extension, without respect to whether the modifier is a noun, pronoun, interrogative, indefinite, or numeral (see Chapter 5 for a detailed description of subclasses of nominals). The semantic relationship between the modifier NP and the head is not limited to possession, but includes whole-part relation, attribution, and number specification (where the modifier NP is headed by a numeral word). Some representative examples follow.

- (4–5) a. *vva=ga* *ffa*
 2SG=GEN child
 ‘your child’ [possession: modifier as a pronoun]
- b. *taru=nu* *ffa?*
 who=GEN child
 ‘Whose child?’ [possession: modifier as an interrogative]
- c. *taugagara=nu* *ffa*
 someone=GEN child
 ‘someone’s child’ [possession: modifier as an indefinite]
- (4–6) *vva=ga* *jaa*
 2SG=GEN house
 ‘your house’ [possession]
- (4–7) *kii=nu* *juda*
 tree=GEN branch
 ‘Tree’s branch’ [whole-part relation]

- (4–8) *irav=nu* *pžtu*
 Irabu=GEN man
 ‘A man from Irabu’ [attributive]
- (4–9) *vva=ga* *panasĩ*
 2SG=GEN talk
 ‘your talk’ or ‘a talk about you’ [attributive or ‘about’ relation]
- (4–10) *giin=nu* *zjunji+sinsii*
 congressman=GEN Junji+gentleman
 ‘Mr. Junji, a congressman’ [appositional]
- (4–11) *mž-taar=nu* *pžtu*
 three-CLF.HUMAN=GEN man
 ‘three men’ [number specification]

As is shown in (4–5) and (4–6), there is no formal distinction between alienable and inalienable possession in Irabu. General attributive modification in which the modifying NP describes an unidentified NP by attributing some property on it, as in ‘a man from Irabu’, ‘a foreign person’, and so on, is encoded more often by compounding, which also accounts for the bulk of property concept modification as in *imi+gan* ‘small+crab: a small crab’ (§8.3.4). Thus (4–8) is preferably restated as *irav+pžtu* ‘Irabu man’.

Along with the fact that a modifier NP may be headed by a numeral word (which is a subclass of nominal in Irabu; see §5.2.3), it is noted that a modifier NP may be headed by an adjective (§8.2). Thus, as exemplified in (4–12) below, an adjective as a modifier NP carries genitive case, as in the case of other modifier NPs as noted above.²

- (4–12) *takaa+taka=nu* *pžtu=nu=du* *ur-Ø*.
 RED+high=GEN man=NOM=FOC exist-NPST
 ‘(There) is a tall man.’

4.1.2. Modifier filled by adnominal

The modifier slot may be filled by an adnominal word (§3.3.2; §5.4) or an adnominal clause (§11.4.3). See §3.3.2 for cases where an adnominal word fills the modifier slot. As a clausal equivalent of an adnominal word, an adnominal clause does not carry any case when filling the modifier slot, just like an adnominal word.

Under the term ‘adnominal clause’ are subsumed both relative clauses, where an argument within an adnominal clause is grammatically related to

² See §4.1.4 for a discussion in favour of the analysis that an adjective really heads an NP.